

CHAPTER III: COUNTY-WIDE OPEN SPACE PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES

INTRODUCTION

As defined in Chapter II, open space is both a land use in its own right and an attribute of other principal land uses such as agriculture and recreation. Placer County today has great open space value. The goal of Placer Legacy is to assure that most of that existing value will persist in the future. The Placer Legacy Program offers the citizens of Placer County an opportunity to implement a broad range of open space policies found in the County's General Plan, as well as community plans and the cities' general plans. The Program addresses open space resources grouped as:

1. Agriculture and farmland preservation
2. Biological resources, including biodiversity and species of special concern
3. Outdoor Recreation
4. Cultural Resources
5. Scenic Resources/Urban Separators
6. Public Safety

For this Program, practical implementation of General Plan policy requires flexibility to deal with the specific opportunities as they arise. The range of resources to be protected, the approximate scope of protection, and the general forms of stewardship have been identified and are described here.

This Chapter first describes the term *land management* to include a range of different tools and a range of entities that can be involved in implementation (Section A). Section B goes on to discuss each of the Placer Legacy elements and possible strategies for meeting open space objectives. Section C addresses how to maximize the open space benefits of the Program, by setting initial priorities for conservation and discussing ways in which multiple objectives can be met. Finally, Section D outlines a process for regulatory compliance based on a county-wide planning effort for biological resources.

SECTION A: IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

The Placer Legacy Program reflects the need, first identified in the 1994 Placer County General Plan, to inventory Placer County's open space resources and plan for their long-range preservation (see [Appendix C](#)). This need for stewardship has been translated into a series of specific actions tailored to the various resources to be protected. The success of this Program will depend in part upon the variety of tools used to implement the Program.

1. Land Management

Most of the resources under consideration are land-based. Thus Placer Legacy stewardship of open space resources will entail:

- a. Establishing a public interest in land supporting open space resources;
- b. Defining the public objectives for that land;
- c. Operating on the land to fulfill those objectives; and
- d. Monitoring the resources on the land to demonstrate that the objectives are being met and to guide the ongoing management effort.

This Program will use the all-embracing term *land management* to refer to the collective activities intended to preserve or protect open space resources.

Establishing a public interest

The most direct way to establish a public interest in land is through fee simple acquisition. Any land acquisition under the Program will be conducted on a willing seller basis. Therefore, in developing an implementation strategy, Placer Legacy is looking for mutually beneficial land management opportunities to attract willing sellers.

In this Program development process, no specific properties have been designated for acquisition. No additional environmental constraints have been added to properties that are not already subject to application of existing County policies, ordinances or zoning, or to state or federal regulation. This document includes maps indicating the distribution of resources in the County (see Atlas of Placer Legacy Maps) and a discussion of how open space objectives can be met (Sections B and C of this chapter, and Chapter IV), as well as a discussion of initial priorities (Section C of this chapter). In order to carry out the Program, the County and others involved in implementation will need to actively contact landowners with high priority open space resources (as determined by existing and future data sources, including anecdotal information). Landowners to be contacted will be those who are already offering their properties for sale on the open market, and those who have expressed direct interest in participating in the Placer Legacy Program.

Outright fee simple land acquisition is only one tool for protecting open space values. Other tools may be more effective or preferable to the public, and can be applied where needed. Alternatives to acquisition include purchase of an easement on land, which leaves title to the land with the original owner, but conveys certain rights, such as development rights or access, to the public interest (see [Appendix A](#) for an explanation of conservation easements). Similar rights can be obtained less permanently through a lease or contract with the landowner to conduct certain practices that maintain the land's open space resources (see [Appendix H](#) for guidelines on land acquisition).

The public interest rights that may be acquired can be held by a range of entities including the County, a cooperating city, a special purpose governmental entity (e.g. Open Space District or Joint Powers Authority), a private non-profit trust or a private for-profit contractor. Due to the

range and geographic diversity of open space resources under consideration, it is likely that a combination of many institutional approaches will be used to implement Placer Legacy. (See Chapter VII for a full discussion of government structure options.)

Establishing objectives

The present Program is based on a county-wide geographic analysis, incorporating the best available data on current and future land uses, and a wide range of open space resources. The information currently available and being developed on an ongoing basis, is sufficient to guide county-wide Program decisions.

A specific land management strategy, however, will need more detailed information, with site surveys and site-specific management plans. This is particularly true with a willing seller Program, where the initiative for land management comes as much from the landowner as it does from the County. As properties are brought forward for consideration under Placer Legacy, it will be important to prepare a preliminary inventory of open space resources and identify at least the near term (e.g., five-year) management needs and costs. That information will make the partnership between willing seller and the public interest more effective.

Activities

Activities on the land will reflect the open space objectives. In most cases, there will be little need for change from current activities because much of Placer Legacy is directed at preserving the existing quality of the Placer County environment. For example, agricultural land can continue to provide scenic corridor or urban edge definition simply by continuing in any form of agriculture. Usually, more specific management will be needed to preserve and enhance biological values, but these too will entail identification of compatible land uses and management intensity. For example, maintenance of oak woodland/savanna or vernal pool grassland would involve an appropriate grazing regime.

Thus, responsibility for operation could range from direct County or public agency activity, to a contract with a third party such as a wetland mitigation bank operator, or a contract with the owner of the property with very little outside involvement.

Monitoring

After the public interest is established and preliminary objectives are set, there will need to be some appropriate level of monitoring. Monitoring will begin by determining baseline conditions and will collect ongoing information directed at specifically measuring the effects of management and the degree to which objectives are being attained. The interplay between objectives, collection of information, and management techniques is termed “adaptive management” and will play a key role in the success of Placer Legacy land stewardship.

2. Program Scope

The Placer Legacy Program has identified open space resource types (see [Table 3-3](#), Prioritization of Resource Types) and, where possible, mapped their distribution in Placer County. The

Program will determine how extensively the County and others want to undertake active protection of these resources and engage in land management. The scope presented here is very broad. It addresses the protection of special habitats, the establishment of large County parks and maintaining farming as a viable presence in Placer County. It also identifies opportunities for preservation of historic properties and scenic corridors. Table 3-1 identifies the extent that land management will apply to the various Placer Legacy elements.

Actual effort under the Program will depend on the political process and available funding. (A detailed funding assessment is a part of this Program and is included in Chapter VI.) In this Program, it is assumed that substantial, long term public financial support will be available. Extensive funding is needed because land management will require compensation of willing participants and long term responsibility for stewardship and monitoring. Long-term financing is also needed to provide programs and services associated with the effort. Supplemental or alternative funding may come from government or private foundation grants or from development impact mitigation fees or agreements. These alternate sources are likely to have more focused objectives, and different priority setting processes.

Even with a high level of funding support, the Placer Legacy land management Program will be implemented over several decades. New opportunities will arise, changing conditions will lead to changing priorities, and new information will be used to set new objectives and change the way the Program is carried out.

Table 3-1. Land Management Options by Element

<i>Element</i>	<i>Level of Land Management</i>	<i>Type(s) of Management</i>
Agriculture	Undetermined; little land needs to be managed for farmland/timberland preservation <i>per se</i> ; involvement with farmland/timberland potentially large for other Program elements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easements to protect farmland • Education and stewardship incentives for landowners • Limited fee title acquisition for biological objectives
Biological Resources	Potentially important role; could involve landowner participation through a regulatory Program; could involve federal/private land exchange in Sierra Nevada.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fee title acquisition or easements to protect biologically sensitive areas • Public education and stewardship incentives
Outdoor Recreation	Potentially important role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fee title acquisitions for parks • Fee title and easement acquisitions for trails and trail access
Cultural Resources	Specific management of historical properties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fee title acquisition of parcels with identified historic/cultural sites or specific scenic views
Scenic Resources/ Urban Separators	Uncertain; potentially important role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenic easements to define urban boundaries and protect scenic views
Public Safety	Limited need; rely on existing regulation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fee title acquisition of specific parcels along floodways, in avalanche zones, or at key locations for fire safety.

SECTION B: PLACER LEGACY PROGRAM ELEMENTS

The Program follows the guidance contained in the Placer County Board of Supervisor's November 8, 1999 resolution on the scope of Placer Legacy (see [Appendix D](#)). [Table 3-7](#) is a summary matrix presenting program-oriented items from the November resolution along with a summary of how those items can be implemented. The matrix shows that many of the items represent a variable level of effort and that many items are likely to pose geographic choices.

The discussion of Placer Legacy elements that follows is based on a statement of conditions, objectives and recommendations for action that were developed by the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) and the Scientific Working Group during the summer of 1999. The discussion begins with a description of existing conditions followed by a set of recommendations and an outline of actions that can be undertaken. The emphasis here is to show where the Placer Legacy Program can add substantial incremental value to open space and agricultural conservation above that afforded through the discretionary land use process under existing regulation or by present multi-use management of public lands. References to action by "Placer Legacy" means action by some appropriate entity to be determined through the Program implementation process. Usually this will be the County and often the cities, but may be other public or private parties or some future management authority.

1. Agriculture

Setting

Placer County has a robust historical and present-day agricultural economy (see [Map 12](#), Agriculture in Western Placer). More than one third of the productive farmland is owner-operated, a relatively high proportion compared with other Central Valley counties. The farming population is aging, however, and for economic reasons, farmland is increasingly sold for land development or speculation rather than kept in agricultural production by younger generations. Urban growth hastens the rate at which Placer County agricultural lands are converted to non-agricultural uses, especially in western Placer, where large parcel sizes and proximity to Sacramento has made the area a prime target for new residential development. Land speculation in this area drives up land values and may reduce the economic viability of agricultural production.

There is no obvious geographical aspect to agricultural conservation in western Placer County because most of the soils are suitable for some type of agriculture (see [Map 12](#), Agriculture in Western Placer and [Map 30](#), Western Placer Soils). In the context of historical farming there is no one type of agriculture that stands out and is dependent on a particular soil association (with the possible exception of rice). The significance of prime soils is that prime soils may be higher producers, which means more favorable economics, but many Placer County crops are grown competitively on non-prime soils. For example, the present diversity of agricultural types and economic productivity on class IV and lower soils indicates that viable agricultural production is possible throughout western Placer County (see [Map 31](#), Important Farmlands).

Instead, agriculture in Placer County is dependent upon consistently favorable market conditions and on reliable, reasonably priced water of adequate quality and quantity for agricultural purposes. Water is particularly limiting for agricultural lands in the western part of the County. Three surface water purveyors (Placer County Water Agency, Nevada Irrigation District and South Sutter Irrigation District) provide water for irrigation. Groundwater, though more expensive than surface water, is also pumped in many areas. The edge of the Central Valley aquifer follows the edge of the flat valley plain, roughly along the route of Highway 65 (see [Map 13](#), Water Source for Existing Agriculture in Western Placer). East of that aquifer line, groundwater is available in variable quantities and agriculture relies more heavily on surface water.

The Placer Legacy Program defines agricultural conservation from two perspectives: that of the farmer and that of the public at large.

- ♦ For the farmer, preservation of agriculture is almost entirely a matter of economics. Only a viable business can maintain the viability of the land use. The agricultural community also has a social stake in the preservation of farms and ranches. Many families have farmed or ranched for generations; the working landscape and its traditions contribute significantly to the sense of community in rural Placer County.
- ♦ For the public at large, agriculture provides productive open space and community identity, as well as wildlife habitat, although the public currently does not pay directly for these values. Placer County agriculture also provides the public with access to fresh, diverse and high quality locally grown food.

Because agriculture in Placer County is widespread, the scope of preservation is potentially very broad. There may not be enough money to preserve a significant proportion of Placer County farmland through agricultural easements. Other conservation mechanisms will be important and easement purchases may need to address values beyond agriculture alone. Creative funding will be essential in establishing easements. This may require some combination of donated easements and easements purchased with the help of outside organizations, matching funds and other incentives. One approach, given the geographic diversity of the county, may be to establish "neighborhoods" of willing sellers who could work together to protect enough land for viable blocks of conservation easements. The formation of such "neighborhoods" would also help strengthen the agricultural sector economically.

Placer Legacy Implementation

A. Placer County can help the farmer by:

- ♦ Developing a strong local product identity;
- ♦ Providing assistance with marketing of locally grown produce and promoting farmers' markets;
- ♦ Assisting in educating the public regarding the special values of locally grown crops (e.g., cherries, strawberries, and flowers);

- ♦ Identifying the Agricultural Commissioner's Office as an advocate for the agricultural community with the Board of Supervisors;
- ♦ Establishing neighborhood agricultural "districts" with specific policies that are locally applicable;
- ♦ Encouraging neighboring agricultural landowners/producers to collaborate on easements/land preservation;
- ♦ Assisting farmers with tax and estate planning;
- ♦ Continuing to implement and promote the Williamson Act to ensure that the needs of farming operations are protected;
- ♦ Making the existing right-to-farm ordinance more useful to the farmer by educating the public and by intervening in legal challenges subject to right-to-farm;
- ♦ Working to make water available at a reasonable price; and
- ♦ Developing a program to identify methods to protect agriculturally-designated areas from conversion to non-agricultural uses.

There are many ways to implement these levels of assistance, examples of which are listed in [Appendix G](#), Implementation Steps for Agriculture. Some of these measures can be implemented with available resources; others will need new institutional support.

- B. Placer County can help make agricultural conservation valuable to the general public by using agricultural easements as an adjunct to the protection of other land uses (e.g., riparian, recreational or scenic). Easement pricing may reflect this multiple value. The more values that are protected, the greater the value of the easement. The Placer Legacy Program has developed a preliminary framework to guide the prioritization of lands for which purchase of agricultural easements will be considered (see [Appendix M](#), Strategies for Prioritizing Land-based Conservation Efforts). New information and input from the agricultural community will help the Program refine and adjust these priorities as necessary.

2. Biological Resources

Setting

Placer County stretches from the Central Valley to the Sierra Nevada, spanning 9,000 feet of elevation and at least six different ecological zones within three different ecoregions ([Map 15](#), Natural Vegetation Communities with Ecoregions). This elevational gradient translates into high habitat diversity, with no fewer than twenty distinct vegetation associations ([Figure 3-1](#), Placer County Vegetation Composition). Due to the County's linear shape and east-west orientation, the interface with other jurisdictions (five counties and the State of Nevada) is high, and the integrity of most natural communities found within the County depends, in part, upon conditions found outside of the County (see [Map 1](#), Placer County Region). Many natural communities extend into

neighboring counties and, particularly in the foothill region, provide important landscape linkages along the western slope of the Sierra Nevada.

High habitat diversity also results in high species diversity. Given the high rate of change and habitat conversion in the County, many species have experienced large declines since pre-settlement times, and several are thought to be threatened with extinction or local extirpation. More than 100 species have been identified as "sensitive," with some type of special status or recognition assigned by the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and/or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). [Appendix F](#) lists sensitive species known to occur in Placer County, or depend upon habitats that are found in the County. This working list, developed with the assistance of the Placer Legacy Scientific Working Group and biological consultants to the County, represents the current state of knowledge that is likely to change as new information is collected and further biological research is conducted throughout the course of this Program. The inclusion of a species in this appendix simply means that the Program has recognized its potential sensitivity and dependence upon Placer County natural communities. It does not necessarily imply that Placer Legacy will (or can) develop specific implementation measures to address the conservation or recovery of that species. Sensitive species identified by the FWS and DFG as high priority for HCP/NCCP planning are presented in bold in the appendix.

Population growth pressures are having significant impacts on several of the County's most biologically rich areas, particularly in western Placer and the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada (see [Map 11](#), Potential Urban and Rural Residential Growth). In western Placer County, biological values are largely remnant and/or human-modified ecosystems that were significantly altered long ago by gold mining and agriculture. These resources now face loss and fragmentation by urbanization. West slope Sierra Nevada ecosystems, which face only minor urbanization threats, have nevertheless experienced significant change over time as a result of timber harvesting and grazing practices, and will need concerted long-term management.

State and federal endangered species laws and federal wetlands regulations affect many areas in the County, but on the whole, most of the biological resource values in Placer County are not adequately protected by the state and federal regulatory processes alone (see [Table 3-2](#), Existing Regulatory Protection for Placer County Biological Resources, and [Appendix B](#), Existing Open Space Conservation Programs). [Map 16](#) (Special Status Species) indicates known occurrences and potential ranges of several species with regulatory status. However, since the majority of Placer County has not been biologically surveyed, much is still unknown about sensitive species' distributions and the potential impacts of urban growth and development on their populations. Potential distributions can be inferred from known habitat relationships, but the few available species records are insufficient to predict their actual distributions.

The County represents portions of three ecoregions: the Great Valley, Sierra Foothills and Sierra Nevada (see [Map 14](#), Ecoregions of Placer County). Within these ecoregions, the natural communities present reflect differences in topographic, soil, elevation, and land use history (see [Map 15](#), Natural Vegetation Communities with Ecoregions). For planning purposes, the habitats of Placer County were aggregated into five resource groups: streams, grasslands, vernal pools, oak woodlands and Sierra Nevada ecosystems. Each group is defined broadly and is meant to include local, specialized and unusual habitats geographically associated with the main group.

The biological resources of artificial wetlands (e.g. rice fields, drainage ditches), agricultural and urban areas are also considered where appropriate. The current state of scientific knowledge regarding each of these resources was gleaned from the academic literature by Dr. Peter Brussard, Chair of the Scientific Working Group, and presented in summaries included as [Attachment F](#), Guide to Placer County Ecological Zones.

Placer Legacy Implementation

The definition of "protection" as it applies to biological resources in Placer County includes habitat management and enhancement. Tools for protection include, but are not limited to, neighborhood action, public education, conservation easements, land acquisition, residential development standards and stewardship incentives.

The work of the Placer Legacy Scientific Working Group (SWG) has led to a draft of a biological conservation strategy, attached as [Appendix E](#). This plan addresses the various habitats described here in more detail and outlines the research that will be needed implement the biological objectives of the Placer Legacy Program. This plan will lay the groundwork for the regulatory process described in Section D of this chapter.

- A. The Placer Legacy Program will develop a programmatic approach to address sensitive species regulations and protect biodiversity. Consequently, the Program will determine: 1) which biological resources are not covered by existing regulations and hence need action to preserve biodiversity or to avoid additional new regulations, and 2) which biological resources are already heavily regulated but could benefit from a regional and coordinated perspective that will improve the conservation of species. This process has been initiated through various priority-setting exercises, including CAC deliberations, public forums, and the prioritization of resource objectives found in [Table 3-3](#). Decisions regarding Program implementation will occur in a deliberative public manner by the management authority.
- B. Placer Legacy can take advantage of the social importance of biological resources by assisting in public education and volunteer involvement. This effort would be logically organized on a small subregional, watershed, neighborhood, or community-of-interest basis, through which the public can be involved in efforts to identify, fund, protect and enhance biological resources in each of the various social and geographic communities throughout the county. The development of outdoor education curricula, nature centers and/or interpretive trails centered around unique Placer County ecosystems, can further involve and educate the general public in biological conservation. The Program can also work with the agricultural community to identify specific opportunities for Placer County agriculture to participate in protecting biological resources.

Table 3-2. Existing Regulatory Protection for Placer County Biological Resources

Community Type	Potentially Applicable Regulations	Special Status Species
Vernal pool grasslands (hardpan and Mehrten)	Federal Clean Water Act (Section 404) Fish and Game Code 1600, et. seq. Federal/State Endangered Species Acts	Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp, Vernal Pool Tadpole Shrimp, Boggs Lake Hedge Hyssop, California Tiger Salamander
Upland grasslands	None	Swainson's Hawk, Burrowing Owl
Valley riparian/aquatic	Federal/State Endangered Species Acts Federal Clean Water Act (Section 404) Fish and Game Code 1600, et. seq. County/City general plan policies and standards County/City tree ordinances Flood damage prevention and zoning ordinances	Swainson's Hawk, Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, Bank Swallow, Giant Garter Snake, Chinook Salmon, Central Valley Steelhead
Freshwater emergent wetlands	Federal Clean Water Act (Section 404) Fish and Game Code 1600, et. seq. County general plan policies Regional Water Quality Control Boards	Black Rail, Giant Garter Snake
Foothill woodlands	County/City tree ordinances	
Foothill riparian	County/City general plan policies and standards Federal Clean Water Act (Section 404) Fish and Game Code 1600, et. seq. County/City tree ordinances Flood damage prevention and zoning ordinances	Foothill Yellow-legged Frog, California Red-legged Frog
Sierra Nevada hardwoods and conifers	State timber harvest regulations	California Spotted Owl, Northern Goshawk
Wet meadows	Federal Clean Water Act Fish and Game Code 1600, et. seq. State timber harvest regulations TRPA regulations Regional Water Quality Control Boards	Willow Flycatcher, Mountain Yellow-legged Frog
Montane riparian	Federal Clean Water Act Fish and Game Code 1600, et. seq. State timber harvest regulations County general plan policy	Willow Flycatcher, Lahontan Cutthroat Trout
Sagebrush	None	

- C. Western Placer aquatic and riparian habitat, which has been dramatically reduced in extent and quality from historic conditions, has been identified as an important conservation target for Placer Legacy. In Placer County, stream environments represent some of the greatest remaining biodiversity in the County, yet are not consistently protected by existing regulation. While the riparian zone, narrowly-defined, is currently provided some level of protection by various general plan policies and regulations (see [Table 3-2](#) and [Appendix B](#)), permanent protection and enhancement of this resource has great potential to improve wildlife habitat and water quality. Stream-associated resources include all habitats associated with watercourses: riparian, aquatic, wetland and associated upland areas (see [Maps 16, 17 and 18](#)). The Placer Legacy Program can help prevent the further decline (and potential listing under state/federal endangered species legislation) of species by acting now to protect and enhance these habitats. The interrelationships between streams and other elements (physical and environmental) within the watershed need to be evaluated and understood when developing strategies for protection.

Two primary strategies have been identified with respect to aquatic and riparian conservation. First, Placer Legacy will work with landowners to conserve and enhance degraded stream segments through streambed alteration, re-vegetation, and, where possible, widening the vegetated zone within the natural floodplain and, where appropriate, increasing the retention of surface water runoff. Secondly, Placer Legacy can play an important role in protecting existing high quality riparian resources and preventing further degradation from urban encroachment, particularly in rural residential and suburban areas.

Placer Legacy will continue to work with the CALFED Bay Delta Program and Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP) watershed groups for each major watershed (Auburn Ravine/Coon Creek, Dry Creek, American River and Bear River) to identify protection and enhancement needs along western Placer creeks, particularly with respect to anadromous fish habitat.

- D. Vernal pools, while subject to strict mitigation requirements under federal and state endangered species and wetlands laws, have been greatly reduced, and face further fragmentation and isolation as a result of urban growth in western Placer County. Vernal pool conservation is particularly important from a regional perspective, as a large percent of the region's vernal pools are found in Placer County (see [Map 32](#), Valley Vegetation). The Program has mapped and identified significant areas of vernal pool grasslands (see [Map 19](#), Vernal Pool Complexes and Grasslands), and developed preliminary assessments regarding their relative quality. In the long term, conserving large areas with relatively undisturbed topography and hydrology will be more successful than conserving small areas of high pool density, but small pool complexes at the edge of watersheds, particularly on the rare Mehrten volcanic mudflow formation, are also important for preserving biological diversity among pools. The suitability of these areas for Placer Legacy protection, possibly through a partnership between public and private entities, will be evaluated. Large-scale conservation of vernal pools and other seasonal and permanent wetlands would likely form the foundation for a regional permitting program.

- E. Foothill oak woodlands have little regulatory protection (see Table 3-X) and may present the single greatest opportunity for Placer County to preserve large blocks of wildlife habitat in private ownership. Oak woodlands and associated communities of unusual biological diversity, age structure, understory component, landscape linkage, or scenic value may be appropriate for directed, large-scale acquisition. Large areas of relatively intact oak woodlands are found in the northern, less developed parts of the County's foothill region and are associated with some of the larger river/stream systems (e.g., Bear River, Coon Creek, and Auburn Ravine) (see [Map 20](#), Foothill Oak Woodland and Grasslands). These areas are important for maintaining the east-west habitat connectivity necessary for seasonal and annual wildlife migrations, as well as north-south connectivity along the Sierra Nevada foothill belt.

Nearly one half of existing oak woodlands, primarily in the southern part of the County's foothill region, are designated rural residential in the County's General Plan Land Use Diagram (see [Map 20](#), Foothill Oak Woodland and Grasslands and [Figure 3-3](#), Western Placer Vegetation Conversion under General Plan Buildout). In these areas, it may not be practical to undertake widespread conservation by acquisition due to the fragmented nature of the landscape. Instead, Placer Legacy will work to protect these oak woodlands through resident education about their ecological values, local conservation activities, continued application of County policy on discretionary land use entitlements (e.g., the Rural Development Design Guidelines) and continued implementation of County ordinances.

Two ongoing research efforts will help guide Placer Legacy's conservation planning efforts in the oak woodland region. First, the County initiated a multi-year field research effort to determine the influence of parcel size, land use and various habitat features on bird and butterfly diversity (biological diversity indicators) in the foothill oak woodland region. Secondly, the County partnered with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) to characterize the existing extent of rural residential development in the oak woodland belt, and model the impact of future urban/rural development on oak woodland connectivity and extent.

- F. Although the majority of grasslands in Placer County are grazing lands dominated by non-native annual grasses, they still retain significant biological value, particularly for raptors, other birds, and small mammals. Most of these lands should be protected for their agricultural value as well as their wildlife habitat value. Also, some grasslands will be an important component of vernal pool and oak woodland conservation areas. Grassland areas of unusual biological diversity, native species presence, restoration potential, or scenic/urban separator value are appropriate for specific protection in their own right.
- G. For Sierra Nevada ecosystems, the Placer Legacy Program will use its comprehensive, county-wide scope to address the status of biological resources on public and private lands. The Program can use its scientific and technical resources to become an active participant in public land planning (U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management)

and to coordinate with other Sierra-wide planning efforts. The Program will also help develop and coordinate policies that enhance the wildlife value of public and private forestlands. The County will work to identify areas in the Sierra Nevada suitable for local government or non-governmental protection, and opportunities for Placer Legacy to participate in land exchanges, management agreements or similar programs to facilitate these efforts. Small areas with high biological value that are deemed particularly sensitive or contain important sensitive species habitat, such as montane wet meadows and riparian zones, are potential candidates for direct Placer Legacy protection. Larger areas with the potential to improve the connectivity of wildlife habitat at the landscape scale, are more appropriate for federal land agency acquisition and/or management, with the potential assistance of the Placer Legacy Program.

- H. To be effective in the long-term, the Program will incorporate a means to monitor trends in the county, evaluate the success of resource protection and management actions, and respond with appropriate changes in management ("adaptive management"). Trend monitoring of some species and of habitat area and quality could alert the community to a need for action before a resource is in crisis. Resource protection under Placer Legacy will have stated objectives and a monitoring program designed to determine whether the objectives are being met and how management may be changed to perform better. A large part of the monitoring program will be incorporated into a county-wide HCP/NCP (see Guidelines for the Development of the HCP/NCCP in section D of this chapter).

3. Recreation

Setting

Placer County has a large amount of public recreation for its population size. Principal recreational opportunities are those afforded by public lands in the Sierra Nevada and by the relatively high concentration of developed park amenities available in the cities. With the exception of the American River Canyon area, recreational amenities in the lower Sierra and Foothill area are limited, however, creating a geographic gap in recreation opportunities (see [Map 21](#), Recreation, Trails and Public Land).

Currently lacking is low intensity or passive recreation (e.g., hiking, biking, equestrian) with appropriate support facilities (e.g., access, parking, picnic grounds, rest rooms, and interpretive materials), oriented toward natural open space resources and a broad range of users, including residents, school children, and visitors. However, river, lake and reservoir recreation is particularly well developed in Placer County and deserves recognition.

Placer Legacy Implementation

- A. The Placer Legacy Program will enhance recreational opportunities in the County by improving public trail access. This will include the construction of staging areas and parking lots, as well as the purchase of public access easements on private land to provide connections to public land and city trail networks. Placer Legacy may also develop

appropriate trails and passive recreation on lands that have been identified for biological resource reasons.

- B. The Placer Legacy Program will also provide regional recreational facilities in the Lower Sierra and Foothill area, supplementing the recreation opportunities provided on the federal lands to the east (primarily Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands), the State Park-operated areas (Folsom Lake and the Auburn State Recreation Area) and the municipal park facilities provided by the Cities, special districts and the County. Facilities provided by the Placer Legacy Program would provide a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities with an emphasis on passive enjoyment of natural communities with high biological and scenic value. Residents of South Placer incorporated and unincorporated areas alike would be served by providing one or more large (>300 acres) regional parks in a rural setting with a variety of passive recreation opportunities. Such a park may be connected with larger areas of protected land, providing additional habitat value.
- C. Placer Legacy will encourage, facilitate and possibly fund volunteer efforts to provide trail systems, access, or recreational facilities. Private recreational facilities such as campgrounds, ski resorts and hunting clubs will continue to be maintained as a viable land use.
- D. Throughout Placer County, across various types of private and public lands, Placer Legacy can take advantage of strategic opportunities to improve and provide access to an interconnected, regional system of trails and parks. Such facilities would provide diverse recreation opportunities in the county, including camping, outdoor education and other forms of active and passive recreation for all residents. The provision of these facilities should not be based solely on a response to growth but instead can be designed to fill unmet needs and to respond to anticipated or emerging recreational trends.
- E. Placer Legacy will also determine whether there are ways for the Program to help optimize and safeguard river, lake and reservoir recreation. Rivers, lakes and reservoirs are managed by numerous other entities for multiple uses, including recreation.

4. Cultural Resources

Setting

[Note: In earlier Placer Legacy material, this element included consideration of scenic corridors. That issue has been joined with the associated concerns for community edges and urban separators.]

Placer County has well-developed historical resources, particularly around its trans-Sierra and gold rush era history. Many sites have been recognized (see [Map 22](#), Historic Sites and Points of Interest). Other sites lack interpretation, formal status, management or public protection.

Cultural resources have some degree of protection through the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other state laws, including the oversight of the State Historic Preservation Office. On a project-by-project basis, there is some ability to protect these resources at the time that a discretionary project is being considered. However, the ability of CEQA and the land development review process to afford a high level of protection is limited, and consequently these resources continue to be lost due to a variety of circumstances. For example, cultural resources are often lost to construction or land management activities resulting in the disturbance or loss of the resource. Historical resources can be lost to fire, lack of maintenance or demolition.

Placer Legacy Implementation

- A. Placer Legacy can provide opportunities to protect and conserve historical resources by providing funding to identify, evaluate, acquire (where appropriate) and maintain historical resources. Placer Legacy can also provide funding to identify, evaluate and, where appropriate, acquire property with cultural resources (e.g., Native American archaeological resources or paleontological resources). In most instances, a historical or cultural resource could be protected by acquisition due to the presence of other open space resource values on the property. However, due to the rich cultural heritage present in the County, there may be circumstances in which an acquisition solely for the purpose of protecting a unique cultural/historical resource may be appropriate, particularly when that resource is immediately threatened.

5. Scenic Resources/Urban Separators

Setting

[Note: In earlier Placer Legacy material, consideration of Scenic Corridors was included with Cultural Resources; it is included now with the issues of urban separators and community edges.]

With its diversity of setting, ranging from the Great Valley to the High Sierra, Placer County has tremendously valuable scenic resources. Scenic resources can be lost or negatively affected by land management activities, including new construction, vegetative removal and grading activities. Scenic resources may also be negatively affected by airborne pollutants.

The cities of Placer County provide lands and/or funding to establish open space areas within the city that serve that city's population. The locations of these resources are typically based upon function, proximity to users (if any) and costs associated with development and maintenance. More often than not, these areas are not selected to provide an edge or transition between the city and adjacent incorporated or unincorporated land uses. The County and the cities, do however, have an interest in reinforcing clear edges between communities and between cities and the surrounding rural and agricultural landscape to avoid land use conflicts. Existing programs do not provide permanent mechanisms to ensure that such edges and transition areas will exist over time. A different mechanism or program is necessary to identify and permanently delineate transition and buffer areas.

The cities' adopted General Plans have already established a land use pattern around the Highway 65/Interstate 80 corridor area that does not provide for separate distinct urban communities,

particularly between Roseville and Rocklin. Based upon existing General Plan land use designations, the urban core area is a single and distinct urban entity that can be separated and buffered from surrounding rural residential and agricultural areas in the unincorporated area of Placer County and the Town of Loomis through the County's General Plan and the Placer Legacy Program.

Placer Legacy Implementation

- A. For scenic resources, one of Placer Legacy's important contributions will be to satisfy Implementation Measure 1.4. of the Placer County General Plan. This measure calls for the County to "identify and formally designate and adopt a system of scenic routes." Preparing and completing this program will establish a contemporary perspective on the importance of scenic corridors (see [Map 23](#), Scenic Corridors and Vistas). The preparation of such an element is specifically authorized by state law and could build on existing policies in the General Plan and the various Community Plans. Transportation corridors can be preserved to provide the sense of open space that has motivated people to move to Placer County. Placer Legacy would define the visual quality objectives for each corridor, explicitly address the implications of land use change, and define the types of land use change that would not affect view quality. Within these scenic corridors, Placer Legacy can identify the ridgelines and other dominant geomorphic features and natural communities that contribute to the scenic value and character of the area. These areas would be identified in order to prevent these prominent visual features from being dominated by structures associated with new development. Existing policies and guidelines in the General Plan and implementing programs will provide much of the basis for this element of a visual corridor protection program (as was done in the Auburn/Bowman Community Plan.)
- B. Placer Legacy will continue to identify and inventory those particularly significant scenic locations and vistas that are not within a scenic corridor (see [Map 23](#), Scenic Corridors and Vistas). Such areas could be protected through the conservation methods proposed by Placer Legacy, particularly when the scenic resources contain other open space values, e.g., recreational opportunities and cultural resources. However, due to the quality of the scenic values present in the County, there may be circumstances under which acquisition solely for the purpose of protecting a unique scenic resource may be appropriate.

Placer Legacy will identify and permanently protect open space areas that define community edges and create urban separators and transition areas between urban and agricultural land uses, particularly when other open space values are present, e.g., stream corridors, scenic roadways, and sensitive species habitat ([map reference?](#)). Placer Legacy will work with cities to define these transition/buffer areas between the agricultural lands of South and Western Placer County and existing and future urban areas. Placer Legacy can also take advantage of strategic opportunities to establish greenbelts and transition areas between existing and proposed urban areas. Placer Legacy will identify the kinds of land uses and urban designs that would be appropriate in these transition and/or buffer areas.

6. Public Safety

Setting

Principal geographically-oriented public safety hazards in Placer County are flood, fire, and avalanche. The flood hazard is associated with the flatter Western County and the fire with the steep slopes and high fuel of the foothills and lower Sierra, and the avalanche in certain steep high snowfall areas in the Sierra Nevada (see [Map 24](#), Public Safety Constraints). In general, existing local, state, and federal laws (FEMA flood zones) are sufficient to identify and protect public safety. Principal issues relevant to Placer Legacy include the extent to which Placer County can limit development in the floodplain and the ability to require fire defensible space. These policies will overlap with biological conservation objectives for creek and woodland communities.

Placer Legacy Implementation

- A. Placer Legacy will continue to catalog lands with public safety constraints and use this information when screening and ranking lands for biological or other resource acquisition. In some areas of particular fire, flood, or avalanche risk, Placer Legacy may acquire residential parcels on which development would pose an undue risk to the public and a burden on public safety services. In the Sierra Nevada, these parcels may also have biological or scenic values. Further research needs to be conducted in order to determine which lands with public safety constraints are not sufficiently protected by other regulations and policies, and which other resource values are present.
- B. Placer Legacy may also coordinate with other local and regional programs to protect public safety. One example is the American River Watershed Group's effort to control unsafe fuel loading along the north and middle forks of the American River. In the Valley, there may be opportunities to coordinate with the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture program, which is implementing the North American Waterfowl Plan, to improve waterfowl habitat in western Placer County.

SECTION C: INTEGRATION AND PRIORITIZATION OF OBJECTIVES

Resource Overlap and Integration of Objectives

Although discussed separately in Section B, the implementation of the Placer Legacy Program will emphasize the geographic, economic and social integration of open space elements. Some of the greatest opportunities for Placer Legacy will be meeting multiple objectives with a single program. Some of that potential is explored in Chapter IV, where each geographic study area is addressed separately.

In general, integration of objectives is essential to the efficiency of open space and agricultural preservation. Each land management opportunity identified for one purpose, such as biological resource preservation, needs to have broad examination to see whether there are companion purposes that can be met as well, such as rangeland or scenic value. This common sense combination of purposes will make the Placer Legacy Program more efficient and satisfy a broader constituency than would result from a single-objective approach.

In defining multiple objectives, one must identify those objectives that have the greatest constraints and those that have the most exacting land management needs. Those objectives will largely define implementation. Other objectives will provide added value to the implementation program. For convenience, the defining objective will be referred to as the primary objective and the others as secondary objectives. In using these terms, the intent is not to assign a higher social value to one resource or objective over another, only to emphasize the practical process of land management planning.

The Placer Legacy elements that have the most limited distribution will tend to be the primary planning factors: biological resources, cultural resources, and certain recreational needs, such as trails and trail access. Other elements are geographically less specific, such as agriculture and scenic corridors, and others are intermediate, such as regional parks and urban edges.

The potential for overlap is summarized in [Table 3-3](#). Each cell in the table indicates the potential for overlap as high, moderate, or low for the various interactions between open space elements. Each cell also indicates whether land management undertaken primarily for the element in the column heading will likely also serve the element in the row heading. This is often but not always symmetric. For example land management for biological resources will likely have high scenic value, but land managed for scenic purposes may not have biological value, depending on location and land use.

This overlap can be used to formulate possible scenarios for land acreages that meet the objectives of Placer Legacy. Illustrations of such possible scenarios are presented in [Table 3-4](#). Primary objectives requiring larger land areas are outdoor recreation and biology. Without active management, these objectives would be difficult to fulfill. Scenic and agricultural objectives could also entail the acquisition and management of large land areas, but will likely rely on existing County and city departments for preservation and management. Public safety and cultural resources are largely addressed by existing law and established programs, and the incremental management by Placer Legacy will not need to be significant.

Taking into account resource extents, identified objectives, and geographic opportunities, Placer Legacy can set a range of potential land area management efforts. An example of the range of effort is presented in the following table. The acreages listed in [Table 3-4](#) are derived from estimates made by the Planning Department staff and planning consultant, Thomas Reid Associates (TRA) (see [Appendix J](#), Quantitative Implementation Scenarios for specific estimates and methods). They reflect the quantitative geographic inventory of Placer County (see [Tables 3-8, 3-9, 3-10 and 4-1](#), and [Appendix M](#), Strategies for Prioritizing Land-Based Conservation Efforts), but are not derived from a map of specific conservation areas or candidate management land parcels. The acreage figures are intended to show a wide range of possible scenarios for Placer Legacy implementation to serve as a basis for the economic analysis. The quantitative scenarios are based on the objectives set by the Citizens Advisory Committee and the Board of Supervisors, interpreted by staff to reflect a general priority of effort from low to high.

In order to provide a complete basis for the economic analysis, the quantitative scenarios establish a series of area estimates by element and by study area for the low, medium, and high levels of effort. The biology element is derived from estimates of possible conservation for riparian and

creeks, foothill woodland, vernal pools and grassland, and Sierra Nevada habitats. The specific estimates and methodology are described in [Appendix J](#), Placer Legacy Quantitative Implementation Scenarios. The values in [Appendix J](#) have been rounded for [Table 3-4](#).

Table 3-3. Objective Overlap Between Elements

H = High Overlap between purposes; M = Moderate Overlap; L = Low Overlap, little mutual benefit.

Ability of this Element To also serve this Element	Agriculture	Biological Resources	Outdoor Recreation	Cultural Resources	Scenic Resources Urban Separators	Public Safety
Agriculture	–	M <i>Vernal pool and woodland/grassland are compatible with appropriate grazing, Riparian is well buffered by agriculture</i>	L <i>Farming is generally incompatible with public access</i>	L <i>Possibly specific historic locations</i>	H <i>Farm and range land is prime scenic</i>	H <i>Flood plains are quality farm land</i>
Biological Resources	M <i>Depending on practices, can have high value or serve as buffer</i>	–	H <i>Creates large parcels, parcel on creeks.</i>	M <i>Preserves biology of setting</i>	M <i>For creeks, depends on land use.</i>	H <i>Sets aside floodplains, steep slopes. Compatible fuel management</i>
Outdoor Recreation	M <i>Limited public access</i>	H <i>Properly managed public access; education and interpretive value</i>	–	H <i>Education and interpretive value</i>	H <i>Location near cities and scenic corridors has high accessibility</i>	H <i>Flood plains are high value recreation</i>
Cultural Resources	H <i>Preservation of historical use</i>	M <i>Preservation of historical use</i>	H <i>Preservation of historical use and public access</i>	–	H <i>Preservation of historical use</i>	L
Scenic Resources Urban Separators	H <i>Farm and range land is prime scenic</i>	H <i>Biological resources have high scenic value</i>	H <i>Parks are open space and can define cities</i>	H <i>Preservation of historical resources</i>	–	H <i>Creeks and floodplains</i>
Public Safety	H <i>Farm land is low risk to person or property</i>	H <i>Biological management of high risk creek areas, forest edge</i>	M <i>Help manage public exposure to risk</i>	L	L	–

Table 3-4. Possible Scenarios for Land Management Effort

	Extent of Land Management (acres)		
	Low Involvement	Moderate Involvement	High Involvement
Agriculture	500	13,000	40,000
Biological Resources	5,800	23,100	34,300
Outdoor Recreation	2,600	15,800	19,700
Cultural Resources	0	25	55
Scenic Resources/ Urban Separators	0	7,600	29,200
Public Safety	0	1,700	1,700
Total area managed, taking likely overlap into consideration	8,000	30,000	75,000

Source: Placer County Planning Department, Thomas Reid Associates

The reader is cautioned to bear in mind the purpose of these scenarios: to allow the County to consider the full range of possible costs associated with obtaining the public interest and managing the land. These are estimates. The actual areas, and of course the actual location of the land involved, will be based on a process of priority setting, establishment of objectives, and voluntary negotiations with land owners which would stretch over many years. This will be a public deliberative process by the Placer Legacy management authority.

The quantitative scenarios, the discussion of implementation opportunities above, and the specific areas described in Chapter IV focus on the specific role of Placer Legacy in implementing the General Plan policies and does not include existing public land, nor does it include the results of the regional wetland or endangered species permitting process described in Section D. That permitting process leading to an HCP and NCCP would provide additional preservation of biological resources to mitigate the effects of covered activities.

The area estimates in the table are wide-ranging because the level of effort sought by Placer County residents is also wide-ranging, and represents varying levels of Placer County General Plan implementation. The low involvement scenario has Placer Legacy essentially targeting high priority biological resources (vernal pool/grasslands and riparian habitats), with minimal effort focused on foothill woodlands or Sierra Nevada habitats. Low involvement would seek to meet high priority park needs, but would not provide benefits beyond the immediate area managed for public use. The moderate level of involvement demonstrates an effort to expand multiple objective preservation in Western Placer agricultural/rangeland areas and establish a foothill oak woodland/regional park-preserve northwest of Auburn. High involvement implies active management of the majority of Western Placer biological resources in conjunction with multiple benefits to outdoor recreation and farmland preservation, as well as significant undertakings in the Sierra Nevada.

The final row of the table estimates the total land area to be under **land management**, taking into account the probable extent of overlap between element objectives. For the low management involvement, overlap is essentially nonexistent—projects are selected to meet narrow objectives and have limited ability to serve purposes beyond those objectives. For the moderate involvement scenario, it is assumed that most of the objectives fulfilled by large land acquisitions would overlap by seventy to ninety percent. Taken as a whole, this would result in a benefit of roughly 2:1. I.e., the total list of land area objectives could be met in half the area. The upper range is largely undefined, but clearly, as the extent of involvement increases, the overlap between objectives and the efficiency of the Program also increase, although the more extensive farmland preservation in the high involvement scenario has less overlap with biological resources.

Prioritization of Open Space Resource Types

For each of the open space elements discussed in Section B of this chapter (e.g., agriculture, biological resources), the Placer Legacy Program has identified a set of resource types, based on input from the Board of Supervisors, the Citizens Advisory Committee, stakeholder groups and the general public (See [Table 3-5](#), Prioritization of Open Space Resource Types). All previously-generated CAC recommendations and BOS resolution statements address one or more of these objectives. Thus, this list is simply a distillation of recommendations into the resource objectives upon which they were based. In some cases, resource objectives have been more specifically defined, particularly with respect to unique biological communities.

Given the time and funding limitations that may affect the Program's implementation scope, staff has attempted to assign priorities to the various resource objectives, in order to maximize the benefits of the Program. An objective set of criteria has been developed to guide the prioritization process. These criteria are:

1. **Trend** – Is the resource increasing, remaining stable, decreasing or decreasing rapidly? The rate and extent to which a resource is changing in Placer County was determined to be a key factor in determining its priority. Conserving a unique, but stable resource, would not generally be an efficient allocation of effort for Placer Legacy. The following factors were considered in determining resource trends: General Plan buildout projections (see [Table 3-9](#), [Figure 3-3](#) and [Figure 3-4](#)), Williamson Act contract expirations, and other growth and development pressures (see [Map 26](#), Growth Pressures in Placer County).
2. **Private Ownership** – How much of the resource is found on privately-owned lands not currently protected as open space? These areas represent the greatest opportunities for Placer Legacy to contribute additional open space benefits to Placer County. They also represent the areas of greatest uncertainty, with respect to management and future trends. See [Table 3-8](#) and [Figure 3-2](#) for ownership statistics calculated from the County's assessor's parcel database.
3. **Rarity** – How common is the resource within Placer County? This is more easily quantified for biological and agricultural resources (see [Table 3-1](#), Placer County Vegetation Composition), but was also estimated for scenic, cultural and recreational resources. A rarity score was not considered relevant for public safety resources. At this stage, rarity at a larger (e.g., regional) scale was not considered, although it will be an

important factor in the eventual development of an HCP/NCCP for biological conservation.

4. **Protection through Other Programs** – What level of protection is already provided to the resource? In this case, the effectiveness of regulations protecting the resource was also considered. Thus, a resource can be heavily regulated (e.g., under state and federal endangered species laws), but still have a relatively low level of protection. Local, state and federal programs were considered (see [Table 3-2](#) and [Appendix B](#), Existing Conservation Programs).
5. **Number of Sensitive Species** – Does the resource support many sensitive species? This criterion is only applicable to biological and agricultural resources, and was not evaluated for other resources. With respect to biological resources, sensitive species were viewed as ecosystem indicators (see [Appendix F](#), Guide to Placer County Ecological Zones and [Appendix K](#), Sensitive Species List). Although other species may actually be better indicators, the approximate number of known sensitive species was considered an appropriate proxy for this broad level of analysis.
6. **Multiple Objectives Score** – To what extent does conservation of the resource in question also contribute to the conservation of other open space resources? Multiple objectives were listed, and a score was assigned based on the total overlap potential. For a more in-depth discussion of resource overlap, see [Section C](#) in this chapter.

For resources that do not yet exist, such as recreational facilities, the potential to develop or create that resource was evaluated under the above-named criteria. Scores ranging from 1 to 4 were assigned to each resource for each criterion, and an average was obtained for each resource objective.

As indicated in [Table 3-5](#), average scores greater than 3 were obtained for the following resources: valley intensive agriculture, valley rangelands, hardpan and Mehrten vernal pools, valley grasslands, valley riparian/aquatic, valley wetlands, Blue Oak woodland/savanna, Black Oak, sagebrush/east slope conifers, montane wet meadows, passive recreation in the valley/foothill area, scenic transportation corridors, scenic vista points, community separators/greenbelts and buffers between urban and agricultural activities. The highest overall scores were given to scenic and urban separator resource objectives, primarily due to the high threat levels that they face, as well as their unique attributes.

The scores obtained from this prioritization exercise will help guide initial implementation of Placer Legacy by focusing acquisition and program development efforts. Since CAC deliberations contributed to the creation of these criteria, the results they provide are generally consistent with CAC-identified priorities. However, priorities will continue to evolve as the Program progresses and the landscape changes. Funding sources and levels will ultimately help determine the scope and level of effort to be undertaken by Placer Legacy. Furthermore, as many unforeseen opportunities may have yet to present themselves, program implementation will necessarily be flexible, with a built-in ability to respond to new situations.

For resource types with a high degree of geographic specificity (primarily biological), the prioritization of potential areas for fee title or easement acquisition will involve objective, geographic analysis and ranking of resource values, combined with opportunistic evaluation of lands offered by willing sellers. [Appendix M](#) outlines a preliminary strategy for the prioritization of land-based conservation efforts, which will provide the specificity needed to efficiently pursue conservation opportunities. [Table 3-7](#) provides more detail about the timing and funding for program-based implementation measures.

SECTION D: REGULATORY COMPLIANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Pursuant to the goals and objectives adopted by the Placer County Board of Supervisors on April 7, 1998, the Placer Legacy Open Space and Agricultural Conservation Program will serve as the framework for the development and adoption of a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) pursuant to Section 10(a) of the Federal Endangered Species Act and a Natural Communities Conservation Plan (NCCP) pursuant to Chapter 10, Division 3 of the California Fish and Game Code (2800 et. seq.). An HCP/NCCP could help implement the biological conservation goals expressed in the County's General Plan and the Placer Legacy Program objectives.

Placer County can ensure that its Placer Legacy Program achieves key objectives in ways that comply with federal and state laws. Completion of a scientifically sound and adequately funded HCP/NCCP and issuance of applicable permits by federal and state agencies has the potential to enhance the protection of Placer County's biological resources. It will also assist the County and private landowners in meeting their obligations under various laws.

Much of the available land in Placer County is privately held, and a substantial portion of the currently undeveloped private land is already entitled for development. If state or federally listed species are involved, public and private economic activities have to secure incidental take permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), or the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG). If each development project has to negotiate its own take permits, mitigation tends to occur in a piecemeal, time-consuming fashion. However, if Placer County develops an HCP/NCCP, mitigation and conservation can be coordinated as part of a larger plan and a potentially more effective species protection strategy.

With this Program, the County can become the permit issuing authority for compliance with state and federal rules, thus retaining local jurisdiction over public and private development activities. This will add certainty to the development processes and reduce the amount of time normally required to address these issues while at the same time providing a state-of-the-art conservation plan with the potential to preserve the function and value of Placer County's natural communities.

Planning Areas

The Placer Legacy Program will be developing a county-wide HCP/NCCP that is broken down into distinct planning areas and habitat types. Work in each planning area will be generally phased according to immediacy of the threat to species and the amount of scientific information available (see [Appendices E, F and K](#) for more detailed information on species and habitat types). The proposed phasing is identified in [Table 3-6](#).

Table 3-6. Regulatory Phasing

Time Sequence	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 3
Location	Western County	Foothills East Side Sierra Nevada	West Side Sierra Nevada	East Side Sierra Nevada
Primary Habitat and/or Species	Vernal pools/grassland	Foothill oak woodland	Public timberlands	Public timberlands
	Valley riparian	Martis Valley/Squaw Valley and Lake Tahoe	Private timberlands	Private timberlands
	Salmonid habitat in streams	Foothill riparian	Wet meadows, old growth conifers	Wet meadows/montane riparian

Stakeholder Working Group

To develop the HCP/NCCP the Placer County planning director will create a stakeholder working group of 11 to 14 members. This working group will insure that the HCP/NCCP meets the biological objectives of the Placer Legacy open space and agricultural conservation Program and the Placer County General Plan. The working group's task will be to advise staff and consultants on the development of an HCP/NCCP by reviewing, discussing and providing recommendations on information provided to them by staff. The committee should include people who represent the following interest areas:

- environmental
- developers and land owners
- agricultural and timber
- agency staff
- educators
- representatives from the Scientific Review Team (see below)

Members of the Working Group should be:

- interested in working collaboratively with other interests to develop an HCP/NCCP that meets a set of mutually agreed upon guidelines; and
- available to participate in regular committee meetings and maintain ongoing communication with key contacts in the County.

It is anticipated that smaller task groups comprised of various members of the Working Group will work on an as-needed basis to develop various components of the plan. Cities and special districts within Placer County will also be encouraged to participate to address their specific regulatory compliance issues and assist in the County effort.

Scientific Review Team

Development of an HCP/NCCP will need to include the input from conservation biologists, landscape ecologists, community ecologists and other scientists. Such a group was formed in 1998 to develop the biological resources components of the Placer Legacy Program (Chapters III and IV, [Appendix E](#)). By expanding the original group membership to include local biologists familiar with the specific habitats and species of Placer County, the Scientific Review Team will be able to provide both a local as well as national perspective on the development of the compliance program. This newly formed Scientific Review Team will ensure the scientific integrity of the Placer County HCP/NCCP by recommending a set of principles for reserve design, species conservation and adaptive management on which the plan can be based. Some principles that have already been identified include the following:

- Species well-distributed across their native range are less susceptible to extinction than species confined to small portions of their range;
- Large blocks of habitat containing large populations, are better than small blocks with small populations;
- Blocks of habitat close together are better than blocks of habitat farther apart;
- Habitat in contiguous blocks is better than fragmented habitat;
- Interconnected blocks of habitat are better than isolated blocks; and
- Blocks of habitat that are roadless are better habitat bisected by roads.

Guidelines for Development of the HCP/NCCP

In order to ensure that the needs of all interests are addressed, it will be necessary to establish a set of guidelines to measure success. Based on experience from other jurisdictions that have completed successful HCP/ NCCP processes, it is proposed that the guidelines include at least the following concepts:

1. The plan should be based on the best available science.

Best available science means that the Program will:

- be based on principles of conservation biology, community ecology, landscape ecology, individual species' ecology and other scientific knowledge and thought;

- be based on thorough surveys of all species of federal, state and local concern on lands dedicated to conservation or mitigation and lands subject to take activity;
- be reviewed by well-qualified, independent scientists;
- identify and designate biologically sensitive habitat areas for preservation;
- determine the extent of impacts to species from take activity;
- require monitoring of target species on developed, mitigation and other preserved lands for the lifetime of the plan; and
- seek to contribute to the recovery, not just the maintenance, of species covered by the plan.

2. The plan should be created in an open and transparent manner with input from all concerned citizens.

An open and transparent manner means that the Program will:

- provide for thorough public review and comment;
- include a citizen working group that will review the plan at every stage of development; and
- require that negotiations with applicable agencies be conducted in an open manner.

3. The plan should contain elements that assure that the goals of the plan are actually met.

Required elements that will help meet the goals of the plan include:

- monitoring and review of plan objectives and milestones at defined intervals to assure that they are being met, including the identification of a process to suspend, modify, or revoke permits if there is not sufficient compliance with the agreed upon objectives;
- adequate funding sources identified up front for habitat preservation and species recovery goals, based on realistic estimates of future land value for the life of the permits;
- adequate funding for monitoring to determine that plan goals are actually being met;
- adaptive management and periodic review, with sufficient funding to support changes in take activity and mitigation required to meet the plan's goals;
- acquisition of required mitigation lands before development proceeds; and
- performance standards for contributing to species recovery.

Timeline

It is proposed that the Stakeholder Working Group be appointed by December of 2000 and that they begin advising the County on HCP/NCCP development starting in January of 2001. The plan is to proceed along the following timeline:

Phase 1: Western County

December 2001	Complete draft documents for Phase 1, including draft HCP/NCCP and compliance with NEPA and CEQA.
Spring 2002	Administrative and public review of draft documents.
Fall 2002	Issue permits for Phase 1.

Phase 2: Foothills and East Side Sierra Nevada

First half 2001	Start work on Phase 2 documents.
First half 2002	Complete draft documents for Phase 2.
Fall 2002	Administrative and public review.
Second half 2003	Issue permits for Phase 2, as either separate permits or amendments to Phase 1 permits.

Phase 3: West Side and East Side Sierra Nevada

January 2002	Start work on Phase 3 documents.
Fall 2002	Complete draft documents for Phase 3.
Winter 2002-3	Administrative and public review
December 2003	Issue permits for Phase 3, as either separate permits or amendments to Phase 1 and Phase 2 permits.

Table 3-8. Placer County Vegetation/Landcover and Ownership

Community Type	Total Acres	Percent of Total	Public Ownership	Easements	Private and Unprotected
Sagebrush	4,766	0.50%	1,180	0	3,586
Jeffrey Pine/Eastside Pine	6,997	0.73%	3,693	0	3,304
Alpine Dwarf Shrub	191	0.02%	191	0	0
Subalpine Conifer	1,553	0.16%	1,093	0	460
Lodgepole Pine/Red Fir/Aspen	74,853	7.80%	52,281	0	22,572
Sierran Mixed Conifer	214,447	22.34%	152,472	0	61,975
Douglas Fir	26,588	2.77%	9,608	0	16,980
Ponderosa Pine	38,202	3.98%	16,711	0	21,492
Closed Cone Pine-Cypress	85	0.01%	85	0	0
White Fir	110	0.01%	13	0	97
Montane Hardwood/Conifer	26,304	2.74%	7,710	0	18,594
Montane Hardwood	88,777	9.25%	48,826	0	39,950
Montane Chaparral	89,033	9.27%	58,621	0	30,412
Mixed Chaparral	14,148	1.47%	7,944	0	6,204
Wet Meadow	8,921	0.93%	4,455	0	4,466
Montane Riparian	2,761	0.29%	1,713	0	1,047
Blue Oak Woodland/Foothill Pine	62,482	6.51%	4,317	6	58,159
Valley Foothill Riparian	11,522	1.20%	630	53	10,839
Freshwater Emergent Wetland	2,626	0.27%	19	163	2,445
Hardpan Vernal Pool Grassland	16,002	1.67%	433	1,206	14,363
Mehrten Vernal Pool Grassland	2,985	0.31%	125	413	2,447
Non-Vernal Pool Grassland	87,890	9.16%	2,238	394	85,258
Open Water	60,310	6.28%	3,881	5	56,424
Agriculture-Crops	29,660	3.09%	33	459	29,168
Agriculture-Orchard-Vineyard	1,441	0.15%	12	25	1,404
Barren	27,952	2.91%	14,354	271	13,328
Urban	60,549	6.31%	6,655	10	53,883
Total Acreage	961,156		399,292	3,005	558,858

Vegetation/landcover acreages derived from composite GIS layer created by Placer County Planning Dept. (100-ft pixel resolution)

Ownership acreages derived from parcel-based analysis of Placer County Assessor's database

Sources:

DFG: Valley Vegetation (1996)
 CDF: Foothill/Lower Sierra Vegetation (1999)
 USFS: Upper Sierra Vegetation (1990); Wet Meadow Vegetation (1999)
 Placer County: Martis Valley Vegetation (1974)
 DWR: Urban Areas (1994)
 DOC: Urban Areas (1998)
 Foothill Associates: Valley/Foothill Riparian Vegetation (1999)
 NorthFork Associates: Vernal Pools (1999)

Table 3-9. Placer County Vegetation Conversion under General Plan Buildout

Landcover / Vegetation Type	Total Acres	General Plan Urban	General Plan Rural Residential	General Plan Open Space	Agriculture/ Timber
Urban	60,549	35,638	14,108	5,756	5,047
Barren / Other	27,952	995	437	1,812	24,709
Open Water	60,310	174	399	585	59,152
Agricultural Crops and Orchards	31,101	1,613	1,488	322	27,678
Annual Grasslands / Pasture	87,890	15,579	17,231	3,607	51,474
Vernal Pool Grassland	18,987	5,662	684	1,268	11,373
Valley Wetlands	2,626	377	34	42	2,174
Valley / Foothill Riparian	11,522	1,138	3,378	1,772	5,234
Foothill Oak Woodland	62,482	2,935	29,968	4,913	24,666
Montane Hardwood Forest	115,081	5,384	20,542	13,057	76,097
Mixed / Chamise Chaparral	14,148	866	2,508	1,791	8,982
Montane Wet Meadow / Riparian	11,682	329	124	1,745	9,483
Montane Chaparral	89,036	1,630	1,237	3,852	82,317
Yellow Pine Forest	286,430	9,999	12,705	11,928	251,798
Lodgepole Pine / Red Fir Forest	74,853	963	510	3,506	69,875
Alpine and Subalpine Forest / Scrub	1,745	0	0	3	1,742
Sagebrush	4,766	950	137	1,309	2,370
Total Acreage	961,159	84,232	105,491	57,267	57,267

Table 3-10. Placer County Agricultural Land Uses (DWR, 1994)	
Type	Acres
Alfalfa and alfalfa mixtures	14
Almonds	187
Apples	82
Clover	159
Corn (field and sweet)	562
Dairies	45
Deciduous fruits and nuts	193
Eucalyptus	18
Farmsteads	909
Field crops	62
Figs	15
Flowers, nursery and Christmas tree farms	404
Grain and Hay Crops	5,007
Idle	6,681
Kiwis	33
Livestock feedlots	30
Miscellaneous and mixed grain and hay	1,090
Miscellaneous deciduous	647
Miscellaneous truck	6
Mixed pasture	18,162
Native pasture	176
Olives	81
Oranges	54
Pasture	84
Peaches and nectarines	57
Pears	75
Pistachios	71
Plums	665
Poultry farms	200
Rice	21,362
Sudan	446
Truck, nursery and berry crops	90
Vineyards	96
Walnuts	1,192
Total	58,957

Acres derived from GIS data
Source: DWR (1994)